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SUBJECT: AFGHAN IMMIGRANTS IN NORWAY

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Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Kevin M. Johnson
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[1](#)1. (U) SUMMARY. Afghans represent one of Norway,s newest immigrant communities with 72% having been in Norway less than five years. The 8,000 registered Afghans currently living in Norway (including Norwegian-born to immigrant parents), are comprised primarily of refugees and asylum seekers. The community's small numbers are quickly growing; around 1300 new Afghans came to the country in 2008--twice as many as 2007. Given their relatively short period of time here compared to other similar groups, Afghans generally appear to be integrating well, yet they struggle with many hurdles typical of new immigrants. There is currently little reason to worry about widespread radicalization among the Afghan community, but given its quickly growing and changing population, it is possible the trend could shift as new refugees continue to arrive. END SUMMARY.

WHO ARE THEY AND WHERE ARE THEY FROM?

[1](#)2. (U) About half of the Afghans in Norway live in Oslo with the rest spread between Bergen, Trondheim, and other larger cities. Norway initially became a destination for Afghans fleeing the Taliban 10-15 years ago, but it is only within the past five years that larger numbers have arrived. Family reunification and new refugee applications are the primary reasons for this growth. The Afghans' roughly 8,000-strong contingent in Norway puts them at about mid-range among similar immigrant communities that have a majority of members with refugee backgrounds. Although much smaller than the over 22,800 Iraqis in Norway, 21,800 Somalis, and 15,100 Iranians, Afghans are a rapidly growing segment of the Norwegian immigrant community.

[1](#)3. (U) Most Afghans in Norway are Hazaras, an ethnic group whose members are predominantly Shia and are concentrated in Kabul and central Afghanistan, as well as some areas of Pakistan. Hazaras began to flee Afghanistan after the Taliban came to power in 1996 and carried out a brutal persecution of the group. The first few arrived in Norway shortly after 1996, with gradually increasing numbers ever since. The vast majority of Afghans in Norway have only arrived within the last five years (72%).

14. (C) Norway has a long-term commitment to both military and development engagement in Afghanistan with ISAF and the UN. This commitment will likely lead to a continued influx of Afghan refugee and asylum seekers. The issue of how to deal with Afghan asylum seekers has in the past been controversial. In the summer of 2006 Norwegian authorities declared it safe for asylum seekers from parts of Afghanistan to return. The Afghans affected disagreed and held some very public protests outside the Norwegian Parliament, even including hunger strikers. The government gave in (helped by the worsening security situation in Afghanistan) but the potential for difficulty remains.

HOW WELL ARE THEY INTEGRATING?

15. (U) Despite their short period of time in the country, many Afghans appear to be integrating rather well. This is thought to be because many individuals are better-educated and well-off compared to most of their other countrymen even prior to leaving Afghanistan. Many of the Afghans in Norway also have impressive (again, relative to their time here) language capabilities in Norwegian and English. Although most work in restaurants, as taxi drivers, or in other menial jobs, it is not uncommon to find Afghan doctors, lawyers, and businessmen. Afghans' rate of employment is a respectable 65% for men. (Only 31% of Afghan women are employed).

16. (U) Although many Afghan immigrants are more educated than their peers back home, they unfortunately appear to be struggling with education here, even compared to fellow immigrant groups. For example, Afghan student and social organizations are few relative to other communities in Norway, even in cities, although these can be expected to grow with their population. Among registered individuals aged 16-18 years, only 59.4% of first-generation Afghans are enrolled in upper secondary education. Numbers for other immigrant communities whose members are also mostly of refugee background fare much better; 82.7% for Iranians, 71.7% for Iraqis, and 72% for Pakistanis. For Norwegians born to immigrant parents (second generation immigrants), however, Afghans' numbers jump to a respectable 87.5% of 16-18 year olds enrolled in upper secondary education, although even here most other groups have numbers above 90%. Hard numbers on Afghans in university are not yet available given the community's small size. Post has been told anecdotally, however, that there are many enrolled in local universities, especially the University of Oslo--even more than in London and other larger European cities.

17. (U) Housing has been another difficult issue for Afghans, with many living in cramped quarters by Norwegian standards. The percentage of Afghans living in households with two or more families (11.8%) is more than double the national level (4.3%). A majority (54.3%) live in dwellings with five or more occupants, compared to just 17.4% nationally. Only 5.2% live in pairs; nationally this number is 24.3%. All of these numbers represent a broader trend across most immigrants, which is their higher birthrate than non-immigrants. Interestingly, the number that live alone is virtually the same as the rest of Norway--16.3% for Afghans and 16.2% among everyone else. This likely reflects the far greater number of Afghan men than women in Norway, with single men living alone (Afghans have thus far typically married mostly other Afghans). Home ownership is drastically different from the Norwegian average. While nationally 83.8% of Norwegians own versus 16.2% who rent, the complete opposite is true of Afghans; 80.9% rent, with just 19.1% owning a home. This massive contrast may be a result of most Afghan immigrants' short periods of residence in the country, with most opting (or more likely only able) to rent while establishing themselves.

IS RADICALIZATION A RISK?

¶8. (C) Radicalization among Afghan immigrants in Norway appears to be a marginal risk. Afghanistan's Ambassador to Norway Jawed Ludin is optimistic about their prospects for success here, calling it an "amazingly open community" and "educated and open-minded." His positive outlook for the community comes in part from the strength of its individuals, which as stated previously are among the most educated and well-off of Afghans at home (yet ironically not very educated here), leaving them in a better position for success than other struggling immigrant groups which have fewer prospects and a greater likelihood of feeling disenfranchised. Ambassador Ludin's optimism is also a result of knowing why Afghans came to Norway at all--to flee the crime and deprivation of their home country; they have no desire to bring it with them.

¶9. (C) There are a few causes for concern, however. Ludin mentioned concern over the activities of an Afghan mullah named Abdul Raouf, whom he and Norwegian authorities have been following for some time. According to the Ambassador, Raouf has been involved with recruitment of people in asylum centers to return to Afghanistan for potential terrorist actions. Newspapers reported recently that an Afghan imam (not named but we believe it to be Raouf) was visiting the refugee centers (often located in small Norwegian rural towns and therefore not exposed to the generally positive influences of the urban Afghan community) to recruit suicide bombers. Raouf is a well known character to embassy security officials and to the Norwegian police. Norwegian police share Ambassador Ludin's concerns but feel unable to do much aside from monitoring his behavior unless he does something that violates Norwegian law.

¶10. (C) Ambassador Ludin's broader concern about Afghan radicalization in Norway comes not from reservations about the immigrants themselves, but rather from Norwegian society and immigration policy, which he cautions may be "too naive and laid back." In general he is somewhat pessimistic about the ability of more liberal, pluralistic approaches to integration actually succeeding. In Ludin's opinion, trying too hard to accommodate new immigrants may have the opposite of the desired effect. He notes that over-acceptance of immigrants' culture and traditions (mentioning specifically language and religious clothing) may in fact hinder their integration into local life. By too easily allowing them to fall back into their old habits and way of life, this would, he says, in effect deny them of what they came here for in the first place: to establish themselves in Norwegian life, not be cloistered away in immigrant communities as if they were back home.

COMMENT

¶11. (C) The Afghan community's small size and short period of residence means that at this point it is somewhat difficult to make accurate observations and predictions. Some general trends can be formulated, however. First generation Afghan immigrants are relatively well employed and not in great danger of radicalization. As the community grows due to continued influxes of refugees it will change, perhaps increasing the potential for radicalization. The activities of Abdul Raouf, as well as the generally conservative and religious nature of most Afghan refugee seekers could point to problems over the horizon as does the low level of participation in the education system. END COMMENT.

WHITNEY